United Nations A/C.3/56/L.23

General Assembly

Distr.: Limited
24 October 2001

Original: English

Fifty-sixth session
Third Committee
Agenda item 112
Advancement of women

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Traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls

The General Assembly,

Reaffirming its resolution 54/133 of 17 December 1999 and its other relevant resolutions and decisions, and bearing in mind those of the Economic and Social Council, the Commission on Human Rights and the Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights,

Recalling the reports of the Special Rapporteur of the Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights on traditional practices affecting the health of women and children[1] and of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on violence against women, its causes and consequences,[2]

[1] A/56/___.
[2] A/56/___.

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Reaffirming the obligation of all States to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms as stated in the Charter of the United Nations, and emphasizing also the obligations contained in human rights instruments, in particular articles 5 and 12 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,[3] article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child[4] and article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,[5]

Bearing in mind article 2, paragraph (a), of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women,[6] and article 5, paragraph 5, of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief,[7]

Recalling the provisions pertaining to traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls contained in the outcome of the World Conference on Human Rights,[8] the International Conference on Population and Development,[9] the Fourth World Conference on Women,[10] and the twenty-first,[11] twenty-third[12] and twenty-sixth[13] special sessions of the General Assembly,

Taking note of general recommendation 14 concerning female circumcision adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women at its ninth session,[14] paragraphs 11, 20 and 24 (l) of general recommendation 19 concerning violence against women adopted by the Committee at its eleventh session,[15] paragraphs 15 (d) and 18 of general recommendation 24 concerning article 12 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on women and health adopted by the Committee at its twentieth session[16] and paragraphs 21, 35 and 51 of general comment No. 14 (2000) concerning article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at its twenty-second session,[17]

Reaffirming that harmful traditional or customary practices, including female genital mutilation, constitute a serious threat to the health of women and girls, and may have fatal consequences,

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[3] Resolution 34/180, annex.

[4] Resolution 44/25, annex.

[5] See resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex.

[6] Resolution 48/104.

[7] Resolution 36/55.

[8] See A/CONF.157/24 (Part I), chap. III.

[9] See *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XIII.18), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

[10] See *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No.E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

[11] Resolution S-21/2.

[12] Resolutions S-23/2 and S-23/3.

[13] Resolution S-26/2.

[14] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 38* (A/45/38 and Corr.1), chap. IV, para. 438.

[15] Ibid., *Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 38* (A/47/38), chap. I.

[16] Ibid., *Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 38* (A/54/38/Rev.1), part one, chap. I, sect. A.

[17] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2001, Supplement No. 22* (E/2001/22), annex IV.

Expressing concern at the continuing large-scale existence of these practices,

Reaffirming that such harmful traditional or customary practices constitute a definite form of violence against women and girls and a serious violation of their human rights,

Emphasizing that the elimination of harmful traditional or customary practices will contribute to reducing the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections,

Stressing that the elimination of such practices requires greater efforts and commitment from Governments, the international community and civil society, including non-governmental and community-based organizations, and that fundamental changes in societal attitudes are required,

Taking note with appreciation of the work done in the context of the Organization of African Unity to prepare a draft protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa,

Welcoming the call for the elimination of all harmful traditional practices which are detrimental to girls' and women's rights and health made by the Pan-African Forum on the Future of Children, which was held in Cairo from 28 to 31 May 2001,[18]

1. *Welcomes*:

(a) The report of the Secretary-General,[19] which provides encouraging examples of national and international developments;

(b) The efforts undertaken by United Nations bodies, programmes and organizations, including the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Health Organization, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, to address the issue of traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls, and encourages them to continue to coordinate their efforts;

(c) The work carried out by the Special Ambassador for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation of the United Nations Population Fund, and her continuing contribution to the campaign to eliminate female genital mutilation;

(d) The work carried out by the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children and other non-governmental and community organizations, including women's organizations, in raising awareness of the harmful effects of such practices, in particular of female genital mutilation;

(e) The fact that the elimination of harmful traditional or customary practices will be considered during the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly on children;[20]

2. *Emphasizes* the need for technical and financial assistance to those developing countries working to achieve the elimination of traditional or customary

[18] See A/S-27/4, annex, para. 32 (g).
[19] A/56/316.
[20] See A/AC.256/CRP.6/Rev.3, para. 41.

practices affecting the health of women and girls from United Nations fund and programmes, international and regional financial institutions and bilateral and multilateral donors, as well as the need for assistance to non-governmental organizations and community-based groups active in this field from the international community;

3. *Calls upon* all States:

(a) To ratify or accede to, if they have not yet done so, the relevant human rights treaties, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women[3] and the Convention on the Rights of the Child,[4] to consider signing and ratifying or acceding to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women[21] and to respect and implement fully their obligations under any such treaties to which they are parties;

(b) To implement the international commitments made at relevant major United Nations conferences and special sessions and summits of the General Assembly held since 1990 and their follow-up processes;

(c) To collect and disseminate basic data about the occurrence of traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls, including female genital mutilation;

(d) To develop, adopt and implement national legislation, policies, plans and programmes that prohibit traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls, including female genital mutilation, and to prosecute the perpetrators of such practices;

(e) To establish, if they have not done so, a concrete national mechanism for the implementation and monitoring of relevant legislation, law enforcement and national policies;

(f) To establish or strengthen support services to respond to the needs of victims by, inter alia, developing comprehensive and accessible sexual and reproductive health services and by providing training to health-care providers at all levels on the harmful health consequences of such practices;

(g) To address specifically in the training of health and other relevant personnel traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls, also addressing the increased vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections due to such practices;

(h) To take all necessary measures to empower women and strengthen their economic independence and protect and promote the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in order to allow women and girls to better protect themselves from, inter alia, traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls;

(i) To intensify efforts to raise awareness of and to mobilize international and national public opinion concerning the harmful effects of traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls, including female genital mutilation, inter alia, by involving public opinion leaders, educators,

[21] Resolution 54/4, annex.

religious leaders, chiefs, traditional leaders, medical practitioners, teachers, women's health and family planning organizations, social workers, child care agencies, relevant non-governmental organizations, the arts and the media in awareness-raising campaigns, in order to achieve the total elimination of these practices;

(j) To address traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls in education curricula, as appropriate;

(k) To promote men's understanding of their roles and responsibilities with regard to promoting the elimination of harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation;

(l) To continue to take specific measures to increase the capacity of communities, including immigrant and refugee communities, in which female genital mutilation is practised, to engage in activities aimed at preventing and eliminating such practices;

(m) To explore, through consultations with communities and religious and cultural groups and their leaders, alternatives to harmful traditional or customary practices, in particular where those practices form part of a ritual ceremony or rite of passage, as well as through alternative training and education possibilities for traditional practitioners;

(n) To cooperate closely with the Special Rapporteur of the Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights on traditional practices affecting the health of women and the girl child, in particular by supplying all necessary information requested by her and by giving serious consideration to inviting her to visit their countries;

(o) To cooperate closely with relevant specialized agencies and United Nations funds and programmes, as well as with regional intergovernmental organizations, as appropriate, and relevant community and non-governmental organizations, including women's organizations, in a joint effort to eradicate traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls;

(p) To include in their reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and other relevant treaty bodies specific information on measures taken to eliminate traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls, including female genital mutilation, and to prosecute the perpetrators of such practices;

4. *Invites*:

(a) Relevant specialized agencies, United Nations bodies, regional intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations to exchange information on the subject of the present resolution, and encourages the exchange of such information between non-governmental organizations active in this field and the bodies monitoring the implementation of relevant human rights treaties;

(b) The Commission on the Status of Women to address this subject at its forty-seventh session under the priority theme "Women's human rights, and elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls as defined in the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly";

(c) Governments, organizations and individuals that are in a position to do so to contribute to the trust fund that supports the work of the Special Ambassador for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation of the United Nations Population Fund;

5. *Requests* the Secretary-General:

(a) To continue to make his report available to relevant meetings within the United Nations system;

(b) To report to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session on the implementation of the present resolution, with a special focus on recent national and international developments, including examples of national best practices and international cooperation.